



September 25, 2019

Executive Director Mezzanotte and Assistant Executive Director Lunney,

Athletics provide an incredible opportunity to bring people from all cultures, races, language backgrounds, and abilities together with a shared love and passion for sports. Unfortunately, at a volleyball game last night, the opposite effect was had when our Central Falls student-athletes were subjected to both passive and overt racism from the fans in Burrillville. While both districts are working together regarding the specifics of what occurred at the game on 9/24/19, the reason I am writing to the Rhode Island Interscholastic League is because last night was not an isolated incident. Our Central Falls students and families have shared that racist acts, to different levels, occur game after game, year after year, even decade after decade. One community member shared this morning that the same words of "Go back to your country" which were screamed toward our student-athletes last night, were screamed at him when he played soccer for Central Falls High School in the 1980s. We speak up not just for the community of Central Falls but also for student-athletes across the state who face this same discrimination.

While we are working with Burrillville officials to investigate last night's incident, we commend the athletes, from both teams, who showed great sportsmanship despite the discriminating and intimidating behavior occurring in the stands and into the parking lot.

The RI Interscholastic plays a crucial role in the culture and behaviors displayed during games. The Central Falls School District requests that the League look at and address issues of poor sportsmanship, inappropriate behaviors, and racism by teams and fans to uphold the governing values of the League which include equity, fairness, and justice.

I want to use this unfortunate experience as a learning opportunity that calls out decades of inequities and racism experienced by not only our student athletes, coaches, and families in Central Falls, but for all parties throughout the state that have been unfairly treated. I hope that in partnership, we can address this type of situation so there is a clear course of action for teams, game officials, and fans when they feel their concerns of discrimination are being ignored and their safety is in danger.

The Central Falls School District looks forward to hearing from the RIIL and to partnering with you and other districts across the state to create a culture that supports, appreciates and respects all cultures and ensure that incidents like the one described above do not happen again.

Thank you for taking this under consideration.

Stephanie Downey Toledo
Superintendent, Central Falls School District